

**Peter Wilkin: Hungary's Crisis of Democracy.** The Road to Serfdom. Lexington Books. Lanham 2016. XXV, 223 S. ISBN 978-0-7391-8791-3. (\$ 85,-)

Peter Wilkin, a British sociologist, has written a fascinating and thought-provoking book on today's Hungary. The surprising ideas he provides begin with the title of the book. Most contemporaries in the USA and in Western Europe (including the author of this review) would assume that the title refers to the crisis of Hungarian democracy which started in 2010 with Viktor Orbán's landslide election victory and continued into the following constitutional 'revolution', turning the country into an 'illiberal' democratic system. Not so W. For him, the crisis of Hungary's democracy begins in 1989, if not even before that. His narrative is based on world-systems analysis (WSA) with what he calls an 'anarchist squint' according to theories formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein and anti-neoliberal economists such as Michael Hudson, and classical elite theories.

The main argument is that we have to understand the crisis of democracy in Hungary as part of a wider crisis in East Central Europe and the 'Modern World System' (or MWS, W. likes acronyms) in general. After the world financial and economic crisis of 2006 and as a consequence of the relative decline of its core (USA and Western Europe), new centres (such as Vladimir Putin's Russia or China) 'which have less in common with liberal democracy' (p. xiii) have been on the rise. However, it was Hungary's political elites, pushed by IMF, the EU, and particularly the interests of multi-national corporations and international finance elites ('the 1 %'), who subjected the country to a neoliberal social and economic transformation which resulted in the destruction of the welfare state and the impoverishment of large parts of Hungarian society. Consequently, since the liberal and socialist parties which dominated the country for most of the time between 1994 and 2010 have basically abandoned most Hungarians in order to please international investors, Hungarians almost had no other choice than to turn to Orbán's Fidesz and the neo-Fascist party Jobbik. Orbán, and to some extent also Jobbik, is now attempting to create an authoritarian system, some form of 'developmental state' like South Korea or certain South American countries during the Cold War, in order to modernize the country and make it independent from international debtors. How much further Orbán can go in his project to regain 'national sovereignty' until the country is punished by the EU remains an open question to W., and he sees the role of the European institutions in a very critical light. Instead of supporting East Central Europe in 1989 with a new Marshall Plan, the EEC/EU instead forced a brutal neo-liberal shock-therapy (like the 1996 Bokros-package in Hungary) upon it. This was supported by the new (and some older) local political elites and made possible by the strong anti-communist and anti-state tendencies at the time (p. 165).

There is much truth in this diagnosis of the Hungarian patient. Many, probably most, Hungarians have experienced the post-communist period not only as a major disappointment because the 'return to Europe' seems to have been rather a 'detour from periphery to periphery' (Ivan T. Berend), or, as W. puts it, as a journey to become 'the Mexico' of Europe, only interesting to the elites of the core countries of the MWS because of low wages, an educated population, and weak unions (p. 165). It is also true that the Socialist Party has abandoned the original ideas of a social democracy with the state protecting the workers and not just the capitalists; that it was severely punished in the elections of 2010, and is still struggling today; and that social protest and the articulation of the interests of the poor and marginalized (against the Jews and Roma) have become the domain of Fidesz and Jobbik. The book also describes well the problems of Orbán's 'illiberal democracy' and the dangers of neo-Fascism. The study is based on an impressive bibliography and a number of interviews the author carried out during recent years in Budapest.

However, as a historian, I have a lot of problems with W.'s explanations and conclusions. The reality, from the perspective of WSA, seems not to be complex at all. Almost everything can be explained as the evil-doing of the international financial elites who control basically everything, while 'the people', in this case the majority of Hungarians, are enslaved through public debt. And the public goods and services they enjoyed under com-

munism (which, as W. admits, had become less and less attractive since the 1980s when the first reforms, inspired by neoliberal ideas, undermined the socialist system) have been privatized. What about the modern technology, factories, machinery, modern infrastructure, public transportation, competitive jobs, etc.—to some extent financed by the European Union but also by foreign capital—which has been brought to Hungary since 1989? W. mentions this, but he mostly talks about the devastation wrought by austerity dictated by German and French banks. He also accuses the EU of not being ‘principally’ interested in democracy, which explains why Orbán’s authoritarian project receives only mild criticisms from Brussels (p. 179, although he also concedes that the EU would only strengthen Fidesz and Jobbik if it were to really punish Hungary). He himself does not criticize Putin and claims that the USA in 2014 ‘sponsored’ a coup in the Ukraine where ‘neo-fascists came to power’ (p. 105), and that NATO encircled Russia (p. 172). This book offers a lot of new insights into Hungary from a global perspective but I am afraid that WSA unfortunately tends to drive scholars to look for the ‘bad guys’ of history and their conspiracies when the reality may actually be more complicated.

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